

How online activist movements contribute to political change in today's society

By James Reen and Joshua Kelly



I'm sure you all have become familiar with online activist movements especially in the past few years. Some of you may even be active members of these online movements while others may only be hearing about them for the first time. These movements have contributed to social aspects of society, but how have these movements contributed to political change in the real world? One of the biggest examples of an online activist movement in the last few years is the Black Lives Matter movement that began after May 25th when the tragic death of George Floyd occurred at the hands of police officer Derek Chauvin. This sparked nationwide outrage and protests throughout America. Many took to social media to voice their outrage with nearly 20 million people supporting the online petition "justice for George Floyd" and it was the largest of all time, it also helped spark a larger racial justice movement worldwide. Through the use of social media, the whole world was made aware of racial discrimination that people of colour still face at the hands of the American legal system. But did any of this help lead to

political change in the American law and judicial system? Shortly after the protests started both New York and Minneapolis mayors vowed to cut their police departments budgets and redistribute the funds towards youth and social services departments. San Francisco mayor also cut the city's police budget and moved the money to programmes for the city's black community. Police officers in states such as Washington, California and Texas were now banned from using chokeholds and officials started to look at making plans for police reform.



On the 12th of January 2022 primary school teacher Aishling Murphy was out for a run when she was brutally beaten and killed by an unknown attacker. Her death sparked outrage across the country and led people to question the safety women have in Ireland. It also brought about discussions in relation to how serious issues are dealt with in the education system. But has there been any political change due to her death? The short answer is no. While there are efforts being made to make changes in government policy and legislation, nothing has passed as of now. Some of the policies being suggested to protect women are to double state funding of sexual and domestic violence services, implement a new gender based violence strategy and set up a task force to address male

violence. Policies that have been suggested to protect teachers are to introduce a sexual harassment policy in schools, include consent in the curriculum and more mixed secondary schools. Despite all these ideas we are yet to see any effective political change as a result of Ashling's death.



Occupy wall street (ows) was a protest against economic inequality and the influence of money in politics that took place in September of 2011. The protests were started by adbusters, a Canadian anti-consumerist organisation who created the website *Occupywallstreet.org* in order to raise awareness for the protest. Soon many different hashtags supporting the campaign began to trend in twitter, such as *#occupywallstreet* and *#takewallstreet*. The movement gained mass popularity and protests started on the 17th of september in wall street and didn't end until november. However, did the protestors efforts result in any real political change? Unfortunately not. No political change came about as a result of the wall street protests but it did succeed in bringing attention to how much political influence big corporations have in American politics. Despite it bringing ows goals also included forgiving student loan debt, bank reform and more jobs. None of the movement's goals have been completed to date. Occupy wall street completely failed to bring about any political change.

